

What Housing Means to Me

Visual Description

This exhibit is a series of photographs taken by 5 different artists. I will describe 5 of the works. Each artist has one side of the large, freestanding gallery panels. There are four double sided panels, covered with a beige carpet-like material, stacked in a line, running north-south. The panel faces also point north-south. The panels are numbered 1 through 8, with 1 being the northernmost panel, 2 being the south facing panel on the rear side of panel 1, and so on, through panel 8 being the southernmost panel. The very first panel has a poster describing the project (text included in the next paragraph) as well as a price list for purchasing copies of the photographs. The next 5 panels each have one artist displayed on them. Each artist has a small artist statement (reproduced below), one large format photograph, and one photo array of 9 smaller photographs. Panel 7 repeats the descriptive poster. There is nothing hung on panel 8, the final panel in the space.

The *What Housing Means to Me* exhibit includes photographs and recorded stories of a number of women experiencing housing precarity and/or homelessness in New Westminster. The project was facilitated by artist-mentor photographer Mihailo Subotic with funding realized by the Community Poverty Reduction Committee and Douglas College. The goals of this project were to use photography and storytelling to highlight the importance of home, belonging, and community, while also facilitating dialogues around affordable housing and misconceptions and stereotypes about those living in poverty and experiencing homelessness. The resulting exhibit has been displayed in multiple locations throughout New Westminster with the aim of generating understanding, compassion and empathy for those in the community facing serious challenges in finding adequate housing. Through the exhibit and dialogue, it is hoped that there will be greater community awareness and support regarding both the need for more housing that is affordable for everyone and the value of including those facing housing challenges in discussions about housing development in our city.

This current exhibition of photographs and digital stories is made possible through a partnership between the New Westminster Public Library and the Changing the Conversation project at Douglas College. The recorded stories can be accessed at nwpl.ca/housing

Panel 2 – Nicole McNeil

“Community is the sum of all its parts experienced often times as fragmented and disconnected. The spirit within is what binds the diversity and becomes the beauty we see each day.”

Nicole’s large photograph is a slightly out of focus image of a wall decal of a tree. The wall behind the decal is beige, shading darker toward the bottom of the image and lighter in the middle. The main trunk of the tree decal rises from the centre of the bottom of the photograph and has one small branch reaching off to the right. Halfway up the image, the main trunk breaks off. Two other main branches can be seen above, horizontally placed, delicately reaching toward either side of the image. The branch on the right of the image is peeling off the wall and sagging down in the middle. Around these main branches, there are several large leaves in various shades of orange and dark green, as well as smaller twigs and a few smaller leaves. All of these parts of the tree are detached and appear to be floating away from the centre. It looks as though an explosion or large wind blew the tree apart and the pieces are gently floating away. There are also three butterflies and a bird flying away from the tree. In the bottom right corner of the image is a plastic hook attached to the wall, and the back of a chair or bench painted in a sunflower pattern.

Panel 3 – Crazy Horse Jane Kornamak

“When I was young, yes I was full of doubt. I outgrew it. Don’t allow others to limit your abilities. Remember, anything you believe you are capable of and so it shall be your truth.

“My last roam around Nome Alaska was 6 months, spring 2018 to fall 2018 at the age of 53.

“Now, I’m looking at touring at the age of 57 through the cold, mean streets of Vancouver. So, my God, may you see I come out the other end.

“I’ve got a good grip on the signs of my steed and we shall ride hard and long! As long as our journey may take!”

Jane’s large photograph is a self-portrait taken in a mirror. Her upper body is visible in the photo as she squints through the viewfinder of the camera with her right eye, the left one squeezed shut. She is a mature woman with bright purple hair cut in a short, shaggy style, and wears many silver rings and bracelets as well as having bright purple painted fingernails. Her t-shirt has some white flowers with a dark brown and gold background. She is holding the camera in a vertical position, with her right hand at the top and her left hand supporting it from below. Just over her left shoulder, we can see a red line-drawing of a horse’s head (side view) peeking out, drawn on the wall behind. Also on the wall behind is written in red a line of text that appears backward in the image (mirror view) and heads up and away from Jane’s head. The text reads, [M]“AKE IT YOUR REALITY!” Beside Jane on the right are some articles of dark brown and black clothing that are hung on a hook and extend from the top to the bottom of the frame. On the left in the top corner, is a purple towel. The rest of the wall behind Jane is mostly white but some markings of red and purple drawings that may have been partially wiped away are visible.

Panel 4 – Lisa Karesa

“Looking out my window I saw a bird nested on the branches, isolated from the rest. Home is supposed to provide you with safety and protection.

“My home does not warrant those feelings. I am consumed with isolation, anxiety and depression. When a bird feels unsafe they are able to take off away from home.

“When a threatening home environment strikes, flying to a sanctuary feels safe to me.

“If I could, I would take off and fly away too...”

Lisa’s large photograph is a striking silhouette image. On a white background, a curved lamppost starts near the bottom right of the image. It stretches vertically in the frame, then curves dramatically back down toward the lower left of the image. At its end is the light head. This dramatic curve is possible with the viewpoint of the artist below the lamp standard and looking up. The curvature is accentuated with the light reflecting off the longitudinal ridges of the lamppost – the ridges almost appear to spiral along the length of the metal post. Just beside the light head a crow raises its wings with feet still touching the lamppost as it lifts off, heading toward the left side of the image. The feet and head of the crow are in focus and the wings are slightly blurred by motion. The photo looks to be a black and white image, but closer inspection of the lamppost reveals some blues. This is a colour image using natural light affects to create a clear silhouette.

Panel 5 – Debra Dugdale

“Rain or shine, I love the beauty and movement of taking my home, which I carry in my heart. Grabbing my bike and going out into the community.”

Debra’s large image shows an extremely crisp, close view of rain-slicked wooden bridge deck or boardwalk, stretching away from the viewer. The boardwalk takes up almost all the width of the photograph, and on the left side is the edge of the bridge. In the middle of the bridge and image is a bicycle facing the viewer – the front tire is turned slightly so we can see it in side view. The front wheel has a shiny hub which is covered by some road grime. Through the wheel the pedals are clearly visible along with the deployed kick stand, but the rear tire is hidden. The forks of the front wheel hide most of the rest of the bike. The shiny chrome front forks have shock absorbers on them, and because of the angle, above them we can see just a bit of a black bag attached to the front handlebars. The handlebars themselves and the top of the bag are clipped by the top of the image’s frame. A tiny bit of bright red on the bag brings a bit of colour into the image.

Panel 5 – Kimberly Larson

“Being born in the ‘year of the dragon’, a Chinese astrological sign, I have always seen the dragon as seeing my strength. The 2 years I spent homeless, alone and isolated by my family, the dragon was seen surrounding me in many places. In Chinatown especially.

“I have never needed this icon of strength more than my time spent on the streets of the downtown east side in Vancouver and New Westminster. Without this powerful mystical force my fate may have ended on those streets. I have been living in a MOD supported by EFry and am the proud new parent of a puppy. ‘Boo-Boo Bear’ is my new hope and reason to survive. I look forward to my move and my new family. Thank you for letting me start a new future.”

Kimberly’s large photo is a simple phrase perhaps a decal on a delicately pink wall. The phrase in stylized black cursive reads, “the best is yet to come”, arranged with two words on each line. The text is centered in the frame, in the upper half of the image. The pink on the wall darkens towards the corners and edges of the image and is brighter in the centre. The text is quite out of focus.